

To Give or Not to Give: The Roles of Narcissistic Grandiosity and Vulnerability in Gift-Giving

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INTRODUCTION

What drives narcissistic consumer in gift-giving—an opportunity to showcase a grandiose self-image, or a battle to maintain current self-image or a matter of both? In this research, we investigate how narcissistic grandiosity, vulnerability, and their interplay, collectively impact gift-giving orientations—to what extent consumers find pleasure from gift-giving and from buying gifts as well as a tendency to offer a generous gift that exceed recipient's expectations.

The research contribution is twofold. Firstly, we provide further insights regarding the role of narcissistic vulnerability in gift-giving which is underrepresented in the extant literature. More importantly, we further investigate how the interaction between narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability impacts gift-giving, which is largely neglected in existing studies.

NARCISSISM AND GIFT-GIVING

The evidence for the relationship between narcissistic grandiosity, narcissistic vulnerability, and their interplay is sparse and tentative. As to the relationship between gift-giving and narcissistic grandiosity, extant literature suggests grandiose narcissists regard gift-giving as an opportunity to achieve their interpersonal goals. For instance, Hyun, Park, and Park (2016) found that in a romantic relationship, grandiose narcissists gift-giving behaviors are driven by the motivations to secure their current relationship and to show off in front of others. This inclination reflects the mentalities that grandiose narcissists hold—linking gift-giving with interpersonal goal pursuits (Emmons 1987; Raskin and Terry 1988; Wink 1991). As such, we hypothesize that grandiose side in narcissism positively influences gift-giving orientations.

H1: Narcissistic grandiosity positively predicts gift-giving orientations.

The relationship between narcissistic vulnerability and gift-giving is underrepresented in the extant literature. A plausible reason lies in a fact that this covert side of narcissism, having a fragile self-esteem, is not strongly related to general goal pursuits (Boldero, Higgins, and Hulbert 2015; Miller et al. 2011; Wink 1991). However, when it comes to self-image threats, such facet could come into play. For instance, Casale et al. (2016) found that narcissistic vulnerability is positively correlated with the motivation of hiding imperfection in the self-presentations. Therefore, we conjecture that narcissistic vulnerability, though triggered by self-protections, still positively impacts gift-giving orientations.

H2: Narcissistic vulnerability positively influences gift-giving orientations.

Lastly, we hypothesize that interplay between narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability, though largely neglected in the extant literature, also positively impacts gift-giving orientations as we argue pure high levels of narcissistic grandiosity or vulnerability are insufficient to promote gift-giving. More precisely, high levels of narcissistic grandiosity would also lead to high levels of self-inflation and arrogance which would demotivate consumers to engage gift-

giving (Emmons 1987; Raskin and Terry 1988). Similarly, high levels of narcissistic vulnerability can result in high levels of introversion (Miller et al. 2011; Wink 1991); the need of maintaining self-image through gift-giving becomes less pressing. Therefore, we conjecture gift-giving are boosted under high levels of both narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability. Our view regarding such interplay is supported by the recent work from Manley et al. (2018) in which they found the conditional effect of narcissistic vulnerability between narcissistic grandiosity and goal persistence.

H3: The interplay between narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability positively influences gift-giving orientations

PRESENT STUDY

We conducted two studies to examine the roles of narcissistic grandiosity, narcissistic vulnerability and their interplay in gift-giving orientation. In our first study, we investigate how narcissistic traits are associated with the two sources of pleasure in gifting—buying gifts and giving gifts (Macklin and Walker, 2015; Mortelmans and Damen, 2001). In our second study, we examine how these factors impact gift choices—choosing a standard gift that meets the recipient's expectations or a generous one that exceeds the expectations.

STUDY 1

Research Design and Measurements

We recruited 103 US participants from Amazon Mturk ($M_{age} = 31.3$; Male = 66) to investigate the influences of narcissistic grandiosity, narcissistic vulnerability and their interplay on two types of pleasure in gifting—pleasure from gift-giving (PGG) and pleasure from buying gifts (PBG). With respect to measurements, we used the narcissism single item scale (Konrath, Meier, and Bushman 2014), the narcissism grandiosity scale (Rosenthal et al. 2019) and the narcissism vulnerability scale (Crowe et al. 2018) to measure the narcissistic trait as a whole ($M = 4.41$), narcissistic grandiosity ($\alpha = .911$, $M = 4.21$), and narcissistic vulnerability ($\alpha = .950$, $M = 4.62$). The self-esteem scale (Rosenberg 1965) was included to contrast differences between non-narcissistic and narcissistic gift-giving tendencies and to treated as a covariate in the model ($\alpha = .727$, $M = 4.52$). As to the two dependent measures, we used Mortelmans and Damen (2001) gift-giving satisfaction scale to measure pleasures from gift giving ($\alpha = .773$, $M = 6.07$) and Macklin and Walker (2015)'s gift-giving joy scale to measure pleasures from buying gifts ($\alpha = .791$, $M = 5.71$). All the research instruments were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) apart from the narcissism single item scale in which we asked participants to indicate to what extent they feel they are a narcissist from 0 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree). Lastly, participants also reported their gifting budgets by stating the number of gifts they generally buy a year and the average price of each gift.

Results

We first assessed common method bias (CMB) by performing Harman's single factor test in SPSS. Having constrained the number of factors to one, an un-rotated exploratory factory analysis revealed that the total variance explained by a single factor is 36.566 which is below the threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al. 2003). This suggests that the dataset does not exhibit CMB issues.

We then conducted the Pearson's correlation test to contrast differences between non-narcissistic and narcissistic gift-giving tendencies (PGG and PBG). The results suggest that narcissistic traits, compared to self-esteem, yield to different gift-giving tendencies. Firstly, all the narcissistic traits are found positively correlated to PBG ($r_{\text{narcissism}} = .337, p = .000$; $r_{\text{grandiosity}} = .405, p = .000$; $r_{\text{vulnerability}} = .238, p = .016$); the correlation between self-esteem and PBG is found insignificant. Contrastingly, none of the narcissistic traits is significantly correlated with PGG whereas self-esteem is ($r_{\text{self-esteem}} = .309, p = .001$).

The follow-up moderation tests were conducted to further examine how narcissistic grandiosity, vulnerability, and their interplay collectively influence PGG and PBG with the use of PROCESS (Model 1) for SPSS (Hayes 2013). Self-esteem, gender, and budget were treated as covariates in these models. We then observed two positively significant interaction effects in both models. As to the pleasure from gift-giving, the results showed that both grandiosity and vulnerability negatively predicts PGG ($\beta_{\text{Grandiosity}} = -.44, p = .013$; $\beta_{\text{Vulnerability}} = -.98, p = .000$) whereas the interplay positively predicts PGG ($\beta_{\text{Grandiosity} * \text{Vulnerability}} = .169, p = .000, 95\% \text{ CI } [.10, .26]$). The follow-up floodlight analysis (Johnson and Neyman 1936) revealed that grandiosity positively predicts PGG under the condition when the levels of vulnerability are at 3.5 and above. Similarly, the negative correlations between vulnerability and PGG turns insignificant when the levels of grandiosity are at 4.09 and above.

As to pleasure from buying gifts, we observed a negatively significant effect from vulnerability ($\beta_{\text{Vulnerability}} = -.63, p = .013$) and a positively significant interaction effect from the interplay ($\beta_{\text{Grandiosity} * \text{Vulnerability}} = .121, p = .005, 95\% \text{ CI } [.04, .21]$). In the follow-up floodlight analysis, the results showed that grandiosity positively predicts gift-buying pleasure when the levels of vulnerability are at 2.45 and above; the negative influence of vulnerability on PBG turns insignificant when the levels of grandiosity levels are at 2.58 and above. To sum up, we observed narcissistic grandiosity, vulnerability and their interplay yield to different impacts on gift-giving tendencies when they are collectively analyzed in the model. More importantly, the results imply that gift-giving is likely to be driven under high levels of both narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability. In our next study, we examine whether such pattern is observed in a choice scenario: giving a standard (or a generous) gift that meets (or exceeds) the recipient's expectations?

STUDY 2

Research Design and Measurements

We recruited 100 US participants from Amazon Mturk with research incentives ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.7$; Male = 53); one participant was excluded from the analysis owing to incomplete responses. In this study, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they are inclined to offer a standard gift (a \$50 reading lamp that meets the recipient's expectations) or a generous gift (a \$90 backpack that exceeds the recipient's expectations) on an 11-point scale (0 = definitely the lamp; 10 = definitely the backpack). The authors used the same instruments to measure narcissism ($M = 2.31$), narcissistic grandiosity ($\alpha = .91, M = 2.65$), narcissistic vulnerability ($\alpha = .93, M = 2.57$), self-esteem ($\alpha = .92, M = 4.74$), and budget. Using the same procedure as in Study 1, CMB analysis showed that the total variance explained by a single factor is 26.493 indicating that CMB is not an inherent feature of our dataset.

Results

The results suggest that narcissistic traits, contrasting to self-esteem, yield to a different gift-giving preference in this scenario. In the Pearson's correlation test, we observed

narcissistic traits are positively correlated to the preference for the generous gift ($r_{\text{narcissism}} = .265, p = .008$; $r_{\text{grandiosity}} = .282, p = .005$; $r_{\text{vulnerability}} = .323, p = .001$); the correlation between self-esteem and this preference was found insignificant. We then conducted a moderation test to examine how narcissistic grandiosity, vulnerability, and their interplay collectively influence gift preference with the use of PROCESS (Model 1) for SPSS (Hayes 2013). Self-esteem, gender, and budget were treated as covariates. The results revealed that the simple main effects of narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability are insignificant, but the interplay is ($\beta_{\text{Grandiosity} * \text{Vulnerability}} = .31, p = .019, 95\% \text{ CI } [.05, .57]$). The follow-up floodlight analysis revealed that narcissistic grandiosity positively predicts preference for the generous gift under the condition that the levels of vulnerability are 4.33 and above; narcissistic vulnerability also positively predicts PGG when the levels of grandiosity are 3.01 above.

In summary, we found the same pattern in this gift preference scenario. Whilst self-esteem is not associated with a preference for a generous gift, both narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability are. More importantly, this inclination is driven under high levels of narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability.

Insert figure 1 about here

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across the two studies, we examined the interactive relationship between the narcissistic traits upon gift-giving. Both studies showed that these traits yield to different gift-giving orientations, compared to self-esteem, in zero-order correlations. We found that both narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability are positively correlated to pleasure from buying gifts (study 1) and to an inclination to offer generous gifts that exceeds the recipient's expectations (study 2), which validate our hypothesis that instrumental values play a central role in narcissistic gift-giving—be it to showcase or maintain their self-image (Campbell, Foster, and Finkel 2002; Hyun et al. 2016; Sherry 1983).

More importantly, we found narcissistic grandiosity, vulnerability and their interactions yield to different impacts on gift-giving orientations. Regarding the single main effect of narcissistic grandiosity, we found that it is only negatively associated with pleasure from giving gifts, compared to that of narcissistic vulnerability which is negatively associated with both pleasure from giving and buying gifts (study 1). We suggest this is owing to the reason that gift-giving is more associated with interpersonal gains (Emmons 1987; Raskin and Terry 1988; Wink 1991). As such, the grandiose side in narcissism makes gift-giving more enjoyable, compared to the vulnerable counterpart. However, in terms of behavioral tendencies, these two facets in narcissism lead to a similar outcome (study 2).

What actually drives gift-giving? We found that all the gift-giving indices in our studies, the pleasure from gift-buying and gift-giving along with the generous gift-giving tendencies, were consistently positively predicted by the interplay. These results support our third hypothesis that only under adequate levels of both narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability would consumers strongly associate the interpersonal gains/ maintenance in the gift-giving which then promotes gift-giving. To the best of our knowledge, we are the earliest who capture such detailed insights regarding how the two sides in narcissism collectively impact gift-giving behaviors.

Insert table 1 about here

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research presents compelling evidence regarding how narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability operate as a complex dyad in explaining gift-giving. However, as the present research was taken under a one-shot hypothetical gift choice, it is inevitably exposed to the issue of hypothetical bias which limits the external validity of the research (Hensher 2010). We recommend future researchers to study consumer's actual gift purchases to overcome this limitation. In addition, as this research only captures the correlation relationship among gift-giving intentions and two forms of narcissism, we also recommend future researchers to adopt the priming technique to further validate the research hypotheses and provide further managerial implications.

As to future research caveat, we recommend researchers to investigate different types of narcissistic gift-giving tendencies such as their preferences to offer experiential (vs. material) gifts as well as how would narcissistic consumers prioritize the potential interpersonal gains (e.g., demonstrating economic vs. social vs. cultural capital) in their gift-giving practices (Chan and Mogilner 2016). Secondly, we recommend future researchers to consider the role of publicity (Griskevicius, Tybur, and van den bergh 2010) in gift-giving and investigate the potential interplay in the decision-making process.

Figure 1: The interaction plot

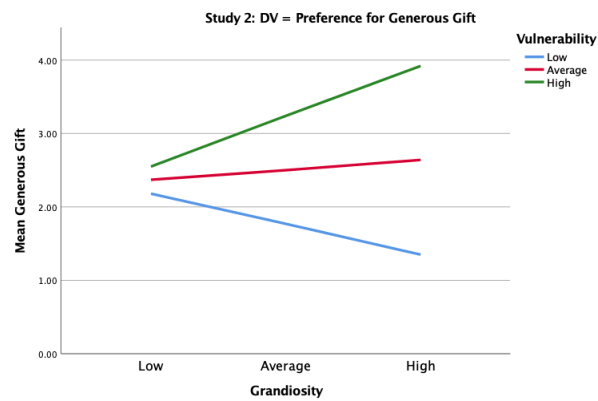


Table 1: Summary of the findings:

H1	Narcissistic grandiosity positively predicts gift-giving orientations	Supported at zero-order correlations (to PBG and generous gift-choice). However, the single main effect of narcissistic grandiosity negatively predicts PGG.
H2	Narcissistic vulnerability predicts gift-giving orientations	Supported at zero-order correlations (to PBG and generous gift-choice). However, the single main effect of narcissistic grandiosity negatively predicts both PGG and PBG.
H3	The interaction between narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability positively predicts gift-giving orientations	Supported. The interaction effect consistently and positively predicts all three gift-giving measures.

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